

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 5 October 2023

Subject: Place Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Bedford

Recommending:

That the report of the Place Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Local Plan

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all Major planning applications will become a statutory requirement from November 2023 (smaller sites from April 2024). Developments often results in impact on, and losses of, nature (net loss). BNG requires developers to deliver for nature, setting a minimum requirement to increase biodiversity by 10% compared to the baseline (net gain). The idea behind BNG is that the environment does not suffer as a result of development, and that there will be more higher-quality places for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy. Developers will therefore need to clearly demonstrate how BNG will be delivered when a planning application is submitted.

The Planning Policy team are working alongside Essex CC as the responsible authority and other Essex Local Planning Authorities in developing a Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document which will identify how Local Planning Authorities will guide developers in securing at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in line with our own strategies, such as the North Weald Enhancement Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

2. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

- The HGGT partner authorities via the HGGT Board have committed to setting up a Joint Committee, approval for which is currently in train across the five partners' individual governance processes. EFDC Cabinet will be reviewing the Joint Committee for approval on 13 November.
- The Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Framework (SMF), a masterplan area which is within Epping Forest District and the Garden Town, was endorsed by EFDC Cabinet to be an important material planning consideration in July 2023. This is the first HGGT strategic masterplan to be endorsed.
- The Latton Priory Strategic Design Code is being undertaken in-house by the EFDC Implementation Team, funded as part of the Dept For Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Pathfinders Programme. The Design Code will be publicly consulted on in October 2023 for six weeks, after it has been to Cabinet on 18 September.
- The draft HGGT Stewardship Charter, and draft East of Harlow Masterplanning Guidance SPD are currently being publicly consulted on until early October, seeking

views from local communities and stakeholders on these two guidance documents. HGGT have appointed youth engagement specialists 2-3 Degrees to support engagement on Stewardship with the Epping Forest and Harlow Youth Councils. The engagement website for both the draft HGGT Stewardship Charter and East of Harlow Masterplanning Guidance SPD consultations can be visited via this weblink: <https://engage.hggt.co.uk/en-GB/>

- The HGGT / EFDC Quality Review Panel Annual Report 2022-23 has been published online, and the QRP Annual Meeting with panellists and officers was held in September.

3. Sustainable Transport

EV and other Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV)

Local residents and businesses continue to show a strong appetite for ULEV, supported in recent months by good growth in the availability of public EV charging in the District. Highlights including the latest available DfT data on the market:

- At end March 2023, EFDC has the second largest number of plug-in cars in Essex (2,643 out of 71.5k on the roads)
- EFDC has the largest number of Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV*) in Essex (1,756)
- BEV as a % of all cars (2.46%) is higher for EFDC than all Essex council areas plus all of the adjoining London boroughs and Herts districts.
- At end of June 2023, the number of rapid chargers (50 kWh+) in the District doubled to 22 compared with Q4 2022, with 6 of these being Instavolt chargers in EFDC car parks – two more have gone live in Q3 and usage levels and satisfaction are high.

Active Travel

Transfer of Rural Prosperity Fund money has now taken place to ECC to carry out the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in Waltham Abbey. PJA appointed and preliminary work is underway with a report in the Autumn.

Demand Responsive Transport

Essex County Council is consulting on its level and type of subsidy for non-commercial bus services, reflecting continued national and regional problems in restoring bus patronage to pre-Covid levels. Any review of whether and how to support DRT services in the EFDC area can only happen after the consultation and into next year. Digigo and the similar Hertslynx DRT services continue to show usage and service growth in comparable rural/market town environments to EFDC's area, but both were in receipt of major DfT and County investment.

4. Climate Change

Climate Change Action Plan Review

A review of the Climate Change Action Plan took place, with a summary document and priorities for 2023/24 agreed at Scrutiny committee on 4 July. A revised Climate Change Action Plan has been published on the EFDC website reflecting the minor changes agreed. The

summary document has also been published showing completed actions, business as usual actions, actions to remove, and priorities for 2023/24.

Climate Change Steering Group

An officer steering group has been set up to oversee the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan. The first meeting took place on 14 September where the terms of reference and objectives of the group were agreed. The objectives of the group include the sharing of information on climate related projects and best practice, facilitating the progress of actions, and the monitoring and reporting of progress.